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AUTHOR Lester, G. Sydney
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ABSTRACT

The author makes several prefatory observations on the hodgepodge nature of current social studies programs, and the lack of a functional (as opposed to descriptive) statement of the means and ends of social studies education. The following functional definition, developed by the staff of the Marin Social Studies Project, is offered: The social studies is that portion of the general education curriculum the purpose of which is to make students more rational with regard to human behavior and social interaction. In dissecting the individual parts of this statement, the author interprets the criterion of rationality and its value as a guide for content selection; explains the inclusion of the terms "social interaction" and "general education", and points up the utility of this definition for teachers and curriculum designers in making decisions about what they do. A rationale for this definition, based on the needs of students, is presented, and the implications of the definition for the development of an improved K-12 curriculum are briefly dealt with. (JLB)

REDEFINING THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

G. Sidney Lester

Speaking to a group of historians about a proper definition for the social studies is a bit like talking about proper diet to a group of apple pie addicts. And God knows, like baseball and motherhood, one does not attack apple pie. My comments would be the same, however, if this were a conference for economists, geographers, or political scientists.

Dr. Edwin Fenton's writings assure me, however, that one of the skills best demonstrated by historians is that of understanding the "frame of reference" which operates both within others and within ourselves. Therefore, as I define social studies I will try to expose my own frame of reference and refer to those frames of reference I believe to be held by historians and other social science disciplinarians.

My frame of reference comes largely from my background as a social studies teacher and my involvement with the Marin Social Studies Project.[1] Funded in 1968, the Project is unique in the nation, particularly in the breadth of its perspective. Simply stated, the Project had two major tasks. The first was to field test and evaluate "all"[2] the new K-12 social studies curriculum materials developed by other projects. The second task was to design a new K-12 "Social Studies Curriculum for a Modern World."[3]

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[1] E. S. E. A., Title III

[2] Basal programs, excluding simulations, independent A-V materials and "supplementary" texts.

[3] The official title of the Project.

The Project staff, along with 30 local teachers and administrators and numerous nationally-known consultants, began to ask questions about social studies education, such as: How did the social studies get to be the way it is? Should it be that way? What is or are the social studies? What should the social studies program accomplish? How can it be improved? And, how does one go about answering such questions?

Note that we did not ask the following kinds of questions: How can the teaching of histor· be maintained at its current level of predominance in the social studies? How can the teaching of economics be improved? Or, which social science disciplines should be most emphasized and/or de-emphasized? We found many others were already asking those kinds of questions, quite unprofitably. You will note that the first set of questions is based on a program for students, while the second set refers to relationships between disciplines.

History of the Social Studies

As we attempted to describe the social studies program as it presently exists, we found it has evolved out of six common assumptions held by educators. The first assumption comes from the 1916 NEA Commission on Social Studies[4] which implied that the social studies is a cyclic repetition of history, geography, and civics; and that (because of the low educational levels attained by students in 1916) U. S. History should be taught three times—in the 5th, 8th, and 11th grades.

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[4]U. S. Bureau of Education, "The Social Studies in Secondary Education," Bulletin #28. Washington, D. C. 1916.

This format was modified by Edgar Wesley's definition of the social studies in 1937: "The social studies are the social sciences adapted and simplified for pedagogical purposes."[5] This allowed for the inclusion of economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and other subdisciplines into the social studies program. A third influential assumption was Paul Hanna's concept of the "expanding environment"[6] approach which recommended that students move in sequence through the study of the family, neighborhood, community, state, nation, hemisphere, and world in the elementary grades.

A fourth assumption was that social studies courses should have relevance and contemporariness, dealing with current issues, ideas, and events in our society and the world.

Together, these first four assumptions have led to the creation of what I call the hodgepodge social studies curriculum (see Figure 1). Each of these assumptions adds to the program, but none of them replaces anything already thought to be a legitimate part of the social studies. With every social science discipline, subdiscipline and topic related to human endeavor included in this curriculum design, the social studies educator is constantly vulnerable to every educational whim and fad in our society. Every social organization, subject matter disciplinarian, and citizen on the street feels that his pet subject or topic should have high priority in the social studies.

And when those priorities include driver education, drug abuse, Black politics, UNESCO, sex education, and the little old lady who wants elementary

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[5]Wesley, Edgar B., Teaching the Social Studies, 2nd Ed., Boston, Heath, 1942.

[6]Hanna, Paul R., "Revising the Social Studies: What is Needed?" Social Education 27:190-196, April 1963.

FIGURE 1: The Hodgepodge Social Studies Curriculum

1916 Report	Wesley	Expanding Environment	Contemporary Affairs
History (U.S. 3 times)	Anthropology	Family	Black History Sex V.D.
Geography	Economics	Neighborhood	Pollution Urban Problems
Civics	Psychology	Community	UNESCO Bill of Rights
	Sociology	State	World Law Elections
	Political Science (not civics)	Region	Drug Abuse Utopias War-Peace Studies International
	U.S. History	Nation	Crime & Police Affairs
	Russian History	Hemisphere	Black Politics Ethnic Studies
	Latin American History	World	Driver Ed.
	Asian History		
	European History		and the lady in the Finnish dress.
	Modern History		
	Medieval History		
	Ancient History		

school students to see her in her native Finnish costume, one really begins to wonder if social studies can be publicly defended without a better definition.

The fifth assumption deals with the confusion educators have regarding the goals or objectives of the social studies. Barth and Shermis recently spelled this out by indicating that these goals are usually thought of as: 1) social studies as citizenship transmission, 2) social studies as social science, or 3) social studies as reflective inquiry.[7] These authors make an excellent case for the distinctiveness of each of these goals, but indicate that many programs are confusingly based on more than one of them.

The final assumption is closely related to the latter assumption, but is has several dimensions. It deals with the failure of educators to establish one set of goals for the social studies and relate these goals to appropriate content. Part of the assumption is that we really shouldn't define social studies.

> "After all, the argument goes, if one defines something, he excludes certain phenomena. And since the social studies is an evolving, changing field, it is incumbent upon all of us to be flexible, tolerant, and warmly receptive of any position. In practice this argument is translated to mean that anything called 'social studies' is thereby social studies."[8]

A second aspect of this final assumption is concerned with HOW we define the social studies. Barth and Shermis are wrong when they say, "It can

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[7]Barth, James L. and S. Samuel Shermis. "Defining Social Studies: An Explanation of Three Traditions," Social Education, Nov. 1967. p. 744.

[8]Ibid. p. 743

be argued that if the social studies is to become a mature discipline, it should carefully DESCRIBE what it is ABOUT."[9] I agree that the social studies needs redefinition, but disagree that a new description is what is needed.

To summarize, the final assumption is based on: 1) the unwillingness of educators to define the social studies and thereby establish it as an independent entity, 2) the unwillingness and/or inability of educators to agree upon and interrelate the goals and content of the social studies, and 3) the assumption that a descriptive definition that tells what the social studies is ABOUT will resolve the definitional issue.

It is appropriate at this point to quote a line from Charles Silberman's new book, Crisis in the Classroom. He says, "Educators do not think pointedly enough about what they do; mindlessness is everywhere rife." The fact that we have so many unquestioned assumptions about what social studies is or ought to be and the willingness of educators to tolerate the resultant hodgepodge curriculum are evidence that Silberman's accusation is sound.

What Kind of Definition?

As the staff of the Project explored the question, "What is the social studies?" we discovered that there are two different kinds of things taught in public schools. One group, which can be labeled "functions," includes things such as reading, writing, spelling, and typing. The other group includes "subjects" such as science, English, math, and social studies. It became

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[9]Emphasis mine.

apparent to us that if one attempts to justify the teaching of any of the "subjects," it was first necessary to define that subject. With the "functions" however this added step was unnecessary. Reading is taught so that students can learn to read. It is impossible to make an equivalent statement about the "subjects." Social studies are taught so that students can learn to ... And there the statement breaks down.

It's possible to define the "subjects" either descriptively or functionally. Descriptive definitions indicate what subjects are ABOUT, while functional definitions of subjects indicate what they will enable students to DO as a consequence of instruction in them. Behavioral scientists attempt to define terms functionally because this kind of definition allows them to distinguish between functional and dysfunctional actions of people or programs.

For example, "teacher" could be descriptively defined as one who possesses a credential, works in a school classroom and receives pay for his efforts; or functionally defined as one who causes his students to learn. The first definition would apply equally to teachers whose students learned and teachers whose students didn't learn.

The same problem exists in defining social studies. A descriptive definition will state what social studies is ABOUT. It will not tell us what students can DO after instruction and therefore provides no information regarding goals of the program. It is my position that a definition of social studies MUST indicate what the goals of the program are and that until I have that kind of definition there is NO WAY for me to determine what social studies should be about. Unfortunately, teachers have never had a functional definition for social studies. Consequently social studies teachers usually

go like hell in all directions simultaneously.

To belabor the point no further, the Project staff opted for a functional definition of the social studies as the only possible means of bringing some clarity to a terribly confused portion of the public school curriculum. Very simply, we chose a functional definition because it is more functional than a nonfunctional definition.

A Functional Definition for Social Studies

After considerable debate and dialogue, the following definition was agreed upon by the staff:

> *The social studies is that portion of the general education curriculum the purpose of which is to make students more rational with regard to human behavior and social interaction.*

We have found that this definition has a high degree of utility for both teachers and designers of social studies curriculum. It provides them with a base line and a set of criteria for making decisions about what they do.

This definition has several major advantages over definitions which have been offered in the past. In order to capitalize on those advantages it is appropriate to point them out and give a fuller explanation to the specific terms used in the definition.

First of all, the definition establishes the social studies as an entity in itself, having purpose and function distinct from history and the social sciences. James Shaver best addressed this problem in 1967 when he referred to Wesley's definition:

> "This definition has done more to stifle creative curriculum work than any other factor for it assumes BY THE VERY SEQUENCE OF DEFINITION--from the social sciences to the social studies--that the criteria selection and development in social studies should come from the social sciences, not from an independent view of what the social studies should be.... Social studies educators have become so conditioned to assuming that the curricular flow must be from the social sciences, including history, to the social studies that the social sciences are the only legitmate source of content for the social studies, that our curricula belie common statements of objectives for social studies instruction."[10]

Jerome Bruner further enticed educators to employ "the disciplines" as the basis for K-12 curriculum in his book, The Process of Education. He declared that children at any age can learn honestly about the structure of a discipline and that the structure of the discipline is intrinsically interesting in itself.

The arguments which defend the flow of curriculum from the social science disciplines to the social studies are very seductive to public school personnel because they lend the rigor and authority that the disciplines represent to the public school curriculum. Bruner's preoccupation with the structure of the discipline is at the same time both helpful and incomplete. The structure of a discipline provides "organizers" which are required to make sense of the "data" studied. However, there is implicit in Bruner's position that the social sciences (anthropology, economics, geography, history, psychology, political science, sociology) are "the" disciplines to be studied and upon whose structures the social studies should rely.

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[10]James Shaver, Social Education, Nov. 1967, p. 588.

We would suggest that social studies is comprised not only of the above disciplines, but additionally those disciplines and nondisciplines which help us deal rationally with human behavior and social interaction. For example, there are obvious needs to draw upon the disciplines of logic, epistemology, semantics, philosophy, education, math, ethics, linguistics, and certain bodies of literature regarding the studies of group process, argumentation, questioning, scientific method, etc.

The issue is a simple one. Social studies programs should be based on the needs of students. Student needs do not come in the form of arbitrarily compartmentalized areas of knowledge, i.e., disciplines. Rather, student needs come in the form of being able to deal rationally with data about the world by utilizing whatever models exist for bringing order to that data. There are numerous models which are appropriate for studying human behavior and social interaction which are found outside of the social sciences per se.

There is a second argument for negating the from-the-social-sciences-to-the-social-studies flow. That is, a number of disciplinarians consider that if they study something within their particular discipline then that provides sufficient reason for students at the public school level to study that thing, too. You can see how absurd that argument is if you consider how much history a student would be exposed to if the sole criterion was that historians have written something about it.

We believe our definition resolves this argument with its plea for rationality as its criterion. It would be very difficult to make a student more

rational about something that he is already willing to be rational about. Once those areas are identified, they can then be omitted from the hodgepodge curriculum. It follows, therefore, that what should be studied regarding human behavior are things which human beings have difficulty dealing with rationally. Hunt and Metcalf have identified these as the "closed areas" or "problematic areas." Power, law, economics, nationalism, patriotism, foreign affairs, social class, religion, morality, race and minority group relations, sex, courtship and marriage are the areas they identified.[11]

You may not wish to agree with the specific list of items that Hunt and Metcalf included in their "closed areas." We can, I think, agree with their concept of closed areas which they describe as "areas of belief and behavior which are largely closed to rational thought"[12] as being most useful as a basis for content selection in the social studies program.

Do not conclude that our definition presumes solely the study of controversial issues. One project, headed by Donald Oliver at Harvard, has taken just that tack.[13] We reject the notion of there being a consistent set of "issues" which are closed to rational thought from one generation to the next or from one area of the nation to another. Therefore we would prefer not to list the specific issues which should be included in the social studies program. Rather, we feel that social studies instruction needs to deal with those areas which are closed, wherever and whenever they are

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[11]Hunt and Metcalf, Teaching High School Social Studies, 1st Ed., 1955.
[12]Hunt and Metcalf, Teaching High School Social Studies, 2nd Ed., 1968.
[13]Oliver and Shaver, Teaching Public Issues in High School, 1966.

found. Since there is a degree of openness on all issues, it is the degree to which an issue needs to be opened to rational inquiry that determines the necessity for its inclusion in the social studies curriculum. Usually the more an issue is closed, the greater is the need of students to deal with it in an open, rational manner.

We can introduce an example at this point and simultaneously deal with the matter of citizenship education. Most definitions or lists of goals for the social studies advocate the development of good citizens. We chose not to include citizenship in our definition. If "good citizenship" in a nation demands nonrational behavior on the part of its citizens, and certainly there are historical cases where this has been evidenced, then we must opt for rational behavior as opposed to good citizenship. To state it a different way, we would say that good citizenship in our nation must be dependent upon rational behavior.

As we developed our definition for social studies, we found that a definition must have supporting rationale and that rationale must be based on the needs of students. The problem with most rationale statements developed by others is that they stopped too soon. Developing rationale statements is a matter of following a means—ends chain. Each time you state what you want students to be, or have, or achieve, you ask the question, "Why?" In following that process we found the best rationale to be the answer to "the last why."

The rationale we offer for our definition is based on the fact that there are today numerous threats to the survival of mankind. We feel that

the development of greater degrees of rationality will enhance the opportunity of our youth to survive in a world worth surviving in.

Note that our definition does not end with the term "rational." Had it stopped there, it would probably be sufficient to teach students logic and mathematics. However, there are numbers of rational logicians and mathematicians who fail to display rationality regarding human behavior. It is for that reason that we included the latter part of our definition which discriminates the social studies from other portions of the general education curriculum.

One more comment about rationality and we can leave that part of our definition. We noted, in a search in several dictionaries, that the terms "logical," "rational," and "reasonable" are interrelated, but in this fashion: Logical implies the use of certain formal principles of thought; rational implies the use of logical thought and, in addition, reasons for the use of those principles; but reasonable includes the use of logical and rational processes and also the quality of reasoned action. As we field tested the connotative strength of the three terms, most people responded that rational is a stronger term than reasonable which seems to have suffered from some overuse. Being reasonable men, we therefore chose the term rational for use in the definition.

Let us proceed to examine some other parts of our definition. The phrase "general education" is a portion of our definition which we borrowed from Dr. Shaver in the article previously cited. We used this term to describe the required program for the typical student in the public school

program. It helps us to respond to certain questions about the social studies program as we envision it.

One question goes something like this: "Should social studies be offered to every student at every grade level in the K-12 program?" To which we respond, "To the extent that it is possible, we should establish minimal terminal objectives for students who will be required to take social studies courses. Once a student has achieved those objectives he would no longer be required to take additional social studies courses."

A second question we feel we will have to entertain is, "Are you going to deny a student in high school the opportunity to take a specialized course in one of the social sciences, if that's what he wants to take?" Our response is, "No, we feel that elective courses in specific disciplines or subdisciplines should be available to students who want them, once they can achieve minimal objectives established by the general education social studies curriculum designed for the typical student."

One part of our definition that is sometimes misunderstood is the inclusion of the term social interaction in addition to the term human behavior. We mean by this that students not only have a need to "understand human behavior," but also have a great need to interact with others more rationally than have their predecessors. It is obvious that human beings spend more time interacting with each other today than they did in the past, and, secondly, that those interaction situations will of necessity need to accomplish more with positive benefits than we have been able to accomplish in the past.

Specifically, committees will need to do more, or better, than merely perpetuate themselves and the "problems" they deal with. They can

do so by learning group process rules dealing with brainstorming, arbitration techniques, role playing, simulations, encounter techniques, etc. We must teach the young not to put on sessions at conferences that are doomed to failure because they did not take into account effective communication techniques. We must teach our youth to discriminate between good conference patterns and poor ones. Or, a better example for this audience, perhaps, is that we must teach the young the principles of the teaching-learning process so that they can educate future generations more effectively than we have. There are, unfortunately, a great number of people who call themselves teachers who feel they are entitled to "lecture" or "do their own thing" in their classrooms regardless of how ineffective they are in causing learning on the part of their students. (But that's another presentation.)

Implications

I have dissected the definition offered here in a number of ways. At this point I would like to deal with its implications for the development of an improved K-12 social studies curriculum.

Almost without exception, the 100 or so social studies curriculum development projects [14] at work during the past decade failed to define the social studies in any comprehensive way. Rather, they operated from their own predispositions about the relationship of their discipline to the social studies. Each felt that this provided them ample rationale for the development of new "social studies" curriculum materials. I have spoken to numerous curriculum development project directors who have indicated to me

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[14] "A Directory of Research and Curriculum Development Projects in Social Studies Education." Published by the Marin Social Studies Project, 1969.

that it was unnecessary for them to develop rationale or even consider whether or not their materials would enhance or fit into an overall social studies program.

Over the past few years there have been beautiful materials developed by projects which will: "teach seniors sociological methodology," "teach high level economic concepts to first, second and third graders," "improve the study of U. S. History at the 11th grade," "teach 7th and 8th graders implications of the law," or "provide first through sixth graders an interdisciplinary view of man," etc., ad infinitum.

Half of the new project materials can only be used if the traditional social studies program is maintained while the other half can only be used if the traditional program is done away with. In either case the vast majority of the new project materials cannot be organized into any kind of comprehensive whole. There is no rationale for adopting the new materials from the new projects in a K-12 program because they developed no such rationale.

This is not to say that the work of hundreds of educators involved in the development of new social studies curricula has not been worthwhile. The "in group" of project people across the nation have argued, debated and shared and stolen many original and worthwhile ideas. Most of all they have enabled social studies teaching to move from a gut-level, intuitive activity to a much more precise and analytical activity because of their products.

The failure of the projects, to date, is that they have refused to take first steps first. That is, they failed to <u>define</u> the social studies in such